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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002447

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SOUTHWEST TRIBES BEGINNING TO AWAKE

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2307
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2273
[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 2124

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The south's tribes are poised to play a significant role in the provincial elections. On July 30 and 31 Senior Advisor Gordon Gray met with leaders of three emerging tribal-based political parties, two of which - the Sheikhs' Council of Southern Tribes and the Mid-Euphrates Alliance - have reportedly allied with Sheikh Abu Risha and the Mutammar Sahwa al-Iraq (MSI), or Iraq Awakening Conference. Although the popular support for tribal parties is unknown, discontent with the performance of the religious parties currently in office may provide tribal leaders with the chance to successfully compete in provincial elections. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On July 30 Gray and PRT members attended a gathering of over 700 provincial tribal leaders hosted by Sheikh Najim Sayah (Abu Chefat) at his guesthouse in Muthanna (Abu Chefat is a prominent member of the powerful Albu Hassan tribe.) The event began with speeches from Abu Chefat, PC Chair Abdul Hussein al Dhalimi, and Sheikh Abu Baqir. Speakers repeatedly stressed the dire state of service delivery; "We used to live under tyranny, but now we live under perpetual darkness," said Abu Chefat. Common themes included Muthanna's role as the birthplace of the 1920 revolt against the British; the need to recognize the leadership role of sheikhs in Iraqi society; and the fact that Muthanna was the first province to transfer to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC). Following the meeting, tribal leaders and U.S. officials adjourned for a lunch and a subsequent discussion. Although vague on details, the sheikhs stressed the importance of the tribes and condemned foreign influence in Iraq from Iran and Saudi Arabia. "We refused to join in Saddam's war with Iran, but now we hate Iran because of what it is doing to our people," said one sheikh.

[1](#)3. (C) On the margins of the meeting, Sheikh Hakim Khasan, leader of the Assembly of the Mid-Euphrates, told us that he had formed an alliance with Sheikh Ali Munshid, leader of the Sheikhs' Council of Southern Tribes, and Shiekh Abu Risha's head of the opposition Mutammar Sahwa al-Iraq (MSI), or Iraq Awakening Conference. He volunteered to arrange a meeting between himself and other tribal leaders with U.S. officials in Baghdad. (Note: Over 900 sheikhs attended a July 16 gathering hosted by Hakim Khasan and Ali Munshid - ref 2273).

[1](#)4. (C) On July 31, Gray and PRT members met with Sheikh Ali Munshid. "Iraq is different than it was in 2005," Munshid said, explaining why he believed tribal parties stood to gain ground in the provincial elections. "There is a saying in the street, 'We listened to the marja'iyya, and all we received is blowhards.'" Munshid added that the tribes were also gaining support in urban areas, because "people know we are loyal only to our land - we have no outside interests." Munshid said that he had worked for the past four years to build his political party and presented a short pamphlet that outlined its platform and goals, including: bringing sheikhs,

academics, and technocrats into the political process; amending the constitution to strengthen Iraqi unity; combating corruption; increasing employment opportunities, and working with foreign countries to support Iraq's political and economic development. Munshid confirmed that he had formed a political alliance with Hakim Khasan and Abu Risha, forming a coalition "that stretches from the north to the south." Munshid dismissed Abu Chefat as a "small sheikh" who had collaborated with Saddam.

¶5. (C) Munshid said he had been asked by Sami al-Askari, on behalf of Prime Minister Maliki, to run as a candidate with the Da'wa party. "They are looking for people who are not politicians," Munshid explained (Note: Reporting (refs b and c) indicates that Da'wa is actively recruiting tribal sheikhs through the south. End note.) He said that he refused the request, and sent a letter to Prime Minister Maliki stating that any delay in the provincial elections was in the interests of Iran. Munshid added that he had also been approached by representatives from ISCI. He acknowledged that successful Iraqi Security Forces operations had increased public support in the south for PM Maliki, but doubted that this increase would translate into additional votes for Da'wa candidates. Munshid dismissed Ibrahim Ja'afari as a "moron" whose electoral chances would be hurt by the participation of Sadrist candidates in the National Reform Trend. He predicted that the south would remain stable during the elections, but warned "If ISCI loses the election in the morning, they will issue a fatwa against the Americans by the afternoon."

¶6. (C) Comment: The south's tribes are poised to play a

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significant role in the provincial elections. Although the popular support for tribal parties is unknown they have several advantages: popular discontent with the religious parties in office is widespread; parties that include academics and tribal leaders may be able to appeal to both rural and urban constituencies; and a Sunni-Shia alliance, if successful, could position the MSI and its southern allies to compete on a national level. The fact that the religious parties are actively recruiting tribal leaders is further evidence of the importance of the tribal vote. Despite the reported alliance with SAI, overall the southern tribes are still fractured, as evidenced by Sheikh Munshid's comments about his political rival, Sheikh Abu Chefat, and personal rivalries may well pose the biggest obstacle to tribal success in the elections. End Comment.

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